

This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 17 Jan 2019

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Edited by Michael Bull

The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies

Bull Michael

Surface Tension: Memory, Sound and Vinyl

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315722191-29>

Nataraj Paul

Published online on: 02 Nov 2018

How to cite :- Nataraj Paul. 02 Nov 2018, *Surface Tension: Memory, Sound and Vinyl from: The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* Routledge

Accessed on: 17 Jan 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315722191-29>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

SURFACE TENSION: MEMORY, SOUND AND VINYL

Paul Nataraj

The mass-produced record was the most potent symbol of the power of the music industry, and some might argue is becoming so once again. Emile Berliner's invention of the disc and his introduction of little 'Nipper', the dog listening attentively to 'His Master's Voice', introduced the music industry proper. The process of manufacture, and importantly Berliner's insistence on the use of these new technologies to record music rather than just the speaking voice, took recording from the hands of the amateurs into the realms of professional expertise (Osbourne, 2012). Since then, as Attali states, 'music has become a strategic consumption, an essential mode of sociality for all those who feel themselves powerless before the monologue of the great institutions' (Attali, 1985: 100). Music in this sense frees us from the monotony of the work place, from the grind of daily life. Whatever the style, according to Attali, it provides some element of resistance, that still sits comfortably, for the most part, within the system that it is allegedly opposed to. Music opens up a space where signification can be negated, and pleasure can ensue. Even though the record is the symbol of sonic fixity, throughout the history of recording, the unique materiality of the record has given rise to creative misuses and subversive practices that have at once revolutionized and disrupted not only the music industry, but also wider cultural creative practices, and as corollary the record buying public, or cultural consumers themselves. In so doing, the use of the record in different contexts has a truly political overtone. Working in the tradition of artists such as Milan Knizak (1996) and Christian Marclay, my own practice-led research project, 'You Sound Like a Broken Record' (YSLABR), has sought to explore the complex relationship between some of the splintered fragments the vinyl records' heterogeneous ontology, opening a productive dialogue between industry, user, artefact, artist, music, and society. I have done this by creating palimpsests, carving ethnographic interviews onto the surface of discs donated to me by their owners. Drawing from this practice, in this chapter I will explore the theoretical underpinnings of instantiating the record and owner as palimpsest.

The main focus will be the story of Sheena and her relationship with David Bowie's 'Station to Station'. I highlight some of the conflicting, reflective, and interweaving narratives and explore their tensions and productivities as they are played out on, in, and through the material, text, and experience of the vinyl record. The personal narrative repositions the record as a complex, vibrant repository and mediator of our sometimes-ignored inner selves. The weight of the records' gravity spins us out in new directions, into a variety of life choices that change

the trajectory of our existences. As one of my respondents Tony says when he first heard the Buzzcocks and became 'like a drug addict, hung up the football boots, and after that it was music every single night' (Tony, interview).

Martin Irvine, quoting Bordieu's theory of collective misrecognition, makes the point that, '[w]e are continually socialized into maintaining – under heavy ideological pressure – ways of preserving the misrecognition of sources, authors, origins, works, and derivations in order to sustain these social categories as functions in the political economy and the intellectual property legal regime for cultural goods' (Irvine, 2015: 17). Bartmanski and Woodward also describe this process as the industry developing 'master narratives that seem to govern the production and reception of culture' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 102). So music, despite what many of us like to think, does not float free of its representational bolt-ons, whether they are discursive, social, or visual. But these multiple mediations cause tension. Not only can some musicological writing, as Chan succinctly observes, 'reduce vibrant musics to lifeless corpses fit for autopsy' (Chan, 1998), but these mediations also interfere with the individual experience of listening. These paratexts are not solely reductive however, they can be simultaneously instructive. They allow us to contextualize our listening and in many cases they play an important pedagogic role. However, they can also be problematic because they are often hegemonic in character. They can be compromised by their modes and contexts of their production, historically fixing meaning to music and therefore playing a vital role in the maintenance of a certain story of music, whose ontology is not that simple to apprehend. If we want to fully realize the communicative potential of music and to see all the nuances of its effects, to provide us with a 'thickness' of expression that goes beyond that of the market expectation, whilst also valuing the role of these discursive systems to provide the space for opposition thus the production of rogue elements, then the stories of the non-expert, the part-time music fan, the ones who lost interest at some time along the way, are equally important to unpack. As Hesmondhalgh (2013) highlights in his work, music can't always be discussed in terms of exuberance and joyousness, sometimes it is the darker, more troubling aspects of our sociality that it speaks to, those moments where words fail us but something must be expressed. If we want to fully appreciate the complexity of our own musical journeys, to give agency to the value and power of our own subjectivity, one could be persuaded by Barthes' compulsion to kill the author. As Burke notes, 'to impose an author on a text is to impose an archaic monoism on a brave new pluralist world' (Burke, 1998: 24), and in the multifarious life of the record this would be an especially reductive approach.

Barthes writes, '[t]he *explanation* of the work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voices of a single person, the *author* "confiding" in us' (Barthes, 1977: 143). In the music industry this is the process of creating the star, producing the saleable image, writing the commodified narrative that at once demystifies and simultaneously mythologizes in a process that potentially freezes form and stifles creativity. Although I don't posit the totalizing effects of the professional critical voice over the discourse of music, its influence cannot be ignored. Musical meaning is not created autonomously by the object of music itself, and as Middleton writes, '[a]ll music existing and newly produced, is unavoidably affected, its meaning becoming more obviously contingent' (Middleton, 1990: 95).

Looking to the 'destination' of the musical text by speaking to those who have developed a personal connection with these objects, new perspectives are highlighted: perspectives that may be able to reposition an individual subjectivity in the hierarchy among industry, listener, music, object and the artist that they have called upon with the stab of a diamond-tipped needle. Each disc represents a series of times, spaces, and experiences woven together through the continued use of the record in new settings and new contexts throughout its life cycle. For me, Bob

Marley's 'Catch a Fire', 1973, first press, in the fold-out Zippo sleeve, is not just an album that I love dearly because of its musical content and its rarity, but it is also the memory of finding the money that I bought it with in a Christmas card given by a kind aunt and uncle. They too have become the story of that record. I remember vividly seeing it on the wall in Astonishing Sounds in Burnley, just after Neil had moved the shop from Northgate in Blackburn, and being filled with hope that I would actually be able to hold it in my hands. The intense feeling of excitement tinged with trepidation at handing over what I thought was a crazy amount of money for a record, whilst at the same time glowing inside that one of these objects would be mine, is something I feel every time I look at the cover, let alone pick the 'thing' up. Being able to buy it was linked to luck, success, competition, but also love. I loved Bob, and this was a way of showing that love; the first press, knowing about it, caring about it, letting other people know I cared about it. Having the object that represented a moment in time where the power was wrested from the hegemony of rock music and placed into the hands and voices of a group of ghetto boys – holding the symbol of that shift. It made me part of it, and it made me feel that I could effect the inequalities of power that I perceived as my 16-year-old self. And now where is it? Locked away in storage, and I'm frustrated that I can't excavate it to relive its sounds as I write this, somehow listening to the mp3 on YouTube won't do. I feel as though I've let it down; how can this be possible, it's just a record after all? But it's the symbolic power it holds of speaking to my personal hopes for the future that is telling. It's not that I've let the record down; I've somehow failed its ideals, and thinking of it reminds me of that. It's bittersweet. I knew of the record because I had read about it in Timothy White's biography of the dreadlocked star. It was through him that I understood the record to be important, its novelty packaging was more than just a gimmick, it represented the fact that Island Records had the faith to back this music, it was an exercise in belief. Tim told me that...

The record, then, has an existence in my memory that is constructed by a series of narratives intertwining to create the object as I know it. All these disparate elements, drawn across space and time come to make up the gestalt of ownership. The relationship is not developed in isolation, and even though one can love a piece of music, a record or an artist in the confines of one's private space, this love is also shared with those around us. These are some of the 'social imaginaries afforded by music' (Born, 2011: 379), and are extremely important in trying to ascertain the subjective value of such objects. My interviewees talk about friends, family, places, spaces, journalists, TV, film, and the wider cultural landscape as wrapped up in their emotional attachment to the object. These disparate elements are very much a part of the complexity, and for some the beauty of the record's significance. 'I just remember loads of people liking that kind of thing, and playing it and getting to know people through stuff like that' (Adam, interview).

These experiences layer and shift over time, they build up on the record's surface like dust, forming a patina through which the music changes its hue. These layers build up and intertwine, creating what Derrida describes as an 'assemblage' of writing that suggests how the text has 'the structure of interlacing, a weaving, or a web, which would allow the different threads and different lines of sense or force to separate again, as well as being ready to bind others together' (Derrida, 1968: 127). By lifting one layer away from another, a personal ecology may be found that unveils the nuances of the object and shows how and where that object came to be its present self, how it accumulated its 'thing' power. The unique materiality of the record affords it multifunctional capacities as sonic storage, art object, and pedagogic prompt, carrier of the subversive and mainstream simultaneously, making the ontological ambiguity at play in the vinyl record troublesome to unpick. Yet there are some familiar voices that reach us through the chains of interrelationships linked by the groove that act like silken threads of signification

inscribed into the lives of the listener. Lifting each of the layers that accumulate on the fragile surface of the record can help us to reassess its value as a cultural icon.

Palimpsests appeared in the medieval world as writing was a costly pursuit and consequently was tightly controlled. Parchment was incredibly expensive and so new scripts had to be written on top of old. Vellum sheets were scrubbed clean in order for this new writing to take place, yet this erasure proved to be impermanent. Over the years the original writing began to bleed back through the newly inscribed work as prolonged exposure to the atmosphere generated 'a ghostly trace ... in the following centuries as the iron in the remaining ink reacted with the oxygen in the air, producing a reddish-brown oxide' (Dillon, 2005: 245). In this way a spool of history is intertwined with the present of the text, as Gosta highlights, '...the writing of the past penetrates the writing of the present, and poses an interruption to the presents unfolding in the very presentation of itself' (Gosta, 2011: 708). The power relations of the time, engendered in the mechanizations of writing, could literally be read in the temporally entwined, twisting inscriptions contained on the one page. The restrictive cost of new parchment meant that decisions had to be made as to which texts would be preserved and which would be erased. Daughtry points out that subversive pagan mythology was often rewritten with the word of God. That which was deemed valueless was literally erased. Silencing voices written, as well as spoken, constructed the future in the image of the powerful. However over the course of time, these lost voices reappeared, and in doing so illuminated the political structuring of previous communities through this discursive positioning.

As music constantly struggles to be freed of its past both sonically and sociologically, its past forms, traditions, and conventions continue to resonate in its present. No matter how hard it tries, through its different mutations and paradigms of modern practice, the dream of originality is always a beat away. Therefore in order to properly constitute a history of music one must forgo the idea of completism. Yet thinking about the enmeshments in a 'palimpsestuous' (Dillon, 2005) way can draw some new roads on music's map, even if finding and accounting for every byway is a cartographic impossibility. Eisenberg writes that '[a] record is a world: It is the world scratched by man in a form that may survive him' (Eisenberg, 2005: 210). Thus the record becomes our guide. It can act as a sonic cartographer's notebook forming triangulation points from which to navigate our tangled musical landscapes and to try and find our place amongst the increasing range of actors engaged with maintaining its trunk roads. Thinking about the record as a layer in the ever accreting palimpsest of a personal musical journey allows for us to 'trace multiple histories, and multiple authors' (Daughtry, 2013: 4), and in so doing we approach the object dialectically. Daughtry, quoting Andreas Huyssen speaking about architectural palimpsests, describes being able to 'read these spaces intertextually and recovering "present pasts" from the abyss of cultural amnesia' (Daughtry, 2013: 5). In other words, in a displacement of this idea from the architectural to the cultural material, the vinyl record produces a site that witnesses these intertwining 'present pasts'.

The idea of the palimpsest is especially telling in the case of tracing some of the meandering ontology of the vinyl record because the record itself goes through a physical transformation every time it is played, as David Toop rather dramatically notes: '[t]he needle plough[s] through the spiralled groove, wearing away both itself and the music it transmits. Each performance writes its own slow suicide note' (Toop, 2003: 126–7). The action of the needle reading the groove causes a deterioration of the records' surface, and the degenerative work of time and physical context also plays its tune on the physical nature of the grooves and consequently is telling of its history. It speaks of the objects' uniqueness and personal connection, in a way that gives value to the demotic:

I mean you look at my copy of it, it's a mess because I battered it to pieces, I mean, I can't even clean it no more, and 'Chemistry' which is on the flip side, which not many

people played, which is probably the best track, or the one that I most like, is scratched at the end, but I've kept it because it's the original copy, it's the one I bought originally.

(Alex, interview)

So can the multilayered writing of the palimpsest offer us an analytical tool when thinking about the vinyl record and our relationships to it? The metaphor of the palimpsest can work on various levels here. It is at once the structuring of the text of the record itself through its means of production and its subsequent marketing comprising the paratexts created to support and explain its existence. And it is equally the process of memory formation that has given rise to the complex formation of the text in the mind of the listener. Musical memories are extremely complex beasts, liminal, labile, and multivalent. Constantly in flux and continually unfolding in a nexus of family, friends, places, and spaces internal and external. Caught between the highly personal and the paratexts of the industry, bound in love and loss, technologically constituted but bedded in our corporeality; shifting temporally, based in the past and emergent through present experience, produced by 'several people writing together' (Barthes, 1977: 144), these memories become 'palimpsestuous'. The beauty of the palimpsest is a gestalt complexity where each individual participant (I think here of participants also as sounds, writings, videos, and so on, not just people) is nominally sealed beneath the next user, yet the participants' voice is faintly audible through the morass of enmeshed experiential fibers that make up its ever-changing surface. So the palimpsest is fluid, mirroring the constant writing and erasure of sound across our auditory space. As we are subjected to a fragmented sonic journey dispersed through a myriad of narratives that are constantly inflected by our subjective position in the soundscape, the text of the record is caught in what Barthes describes as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture' (Barthes, 1977: 146). It could be argued then that Barthes, in killing the author, is actually describing the palimpsestuous nature of the text in his analysis. In constructing the text we are, in Dillon's words, producing an 'involved phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other' (Dillon, 2005: 244). There is something very Barthesian about this for me. In addition if we are to take up Barthes' assertion that 'the text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes, 1977: 148), as stated previously, then my respondents' framing of the importance of the record to them 'is necessary to overthrow the myth' of the genius musical voice, and resurrect the owners' subjectivity in relation to the vinyl record.

Let me introduce Sheena. In our interview, we discussed her original copy of 'Station to Station' by David Bowie that she 'bought when it came out ... in 1976, and I was sixteen'. I'll let her take up the story:

I bought it in Windham, which is a small market town in Norfolk, which is where I was living at the time ... I was already a huge Bowie fan, I had all his other albums, the reason this one is so significant is that it made me take, probably a different course in life ... It opened my eyes to something I realised I wanted, maybe it was because I was sixteen and trusted him because I was such a big fan, where he was going influenced where I was going ... I was just beginning to think I can't stand being in Norfolk much longer ... I want to travel and I want to discover the world, when I bought this record, and knew what was happening in the artist's life, it just made me think God, I can't wait to get out there.

(Sheena, interview)

This record allowed Sheena to see Windham differently, it opened up a portal to the imagined 'new world' that was waiting, full of promise, if only the reality of the present would free the

young Sheena from its shackles. The record represented escape for her, surrounded by posters of the 'Thin White Duke' in her bedroom, head buried in a copy of the *New Musical Express* – 'I was an avid reader of the NME, probably unhealthily obsessed by it' – dreaming of following her hero into fresh and exciting worlds. As Eisenberg poetically imagines, '[w]hen a record is lifted over the platter, a transparency or slide is fitted over a segment of space and time. The effect is a double exposure' (Eisenberg, 2005: 206). This speaks directly to the metaphor of our palimpsest. It may be only an imaginary moment, but as Hesmondhalgh explains further, 'music's distinctive language is one of compressed and elliptical reference to our inner lives and our prospects ... it is close to dreaming in this respect' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 16). Sheena is looking into the Woolworths window in Windham, and seeing herself in Bowie's little clique heading for Hanza studios.

... he went to Europe, he went to Berlin in fact, and that just chimed with me, because I was doing French and German, I was really interested in Europe, I read that he had come to hate America, and the other thing that is relevant here is that, I'd been to America a few times because I've got a really weird family background, which meant that my Mum married an American airman when I was quite young, had my sister and they went to America. And I had this really strange childhood, where I didn't really know where I belonged, and I went to America a few times, and in rural Norfolk no-one went outside, so I said I'd never been anywhere. It's really interesting in that I didn't count America.

(Sheena, interview)

Here we can get a glimpse further into the fabric of the story that makes this record so important for Sheena. The story of her family and her relationship to them is inscribed into its grooves. She says that she 'trusted' Bowie, that she wanted to follow him to Europe, and like him was unable to come to terms with the idea that America had any romance attached to it whatsoever. America had wronged them both. Love was to be found in the futuristic potency, sophistication, and elegant quietude of Europe.

The record spoke to Sheena of the one world being subsumed into another.

The album before that was 'Young Americans' which was very soul, very black, um, soul music, influence which I also loved, um, the albums after it were, the Berlin trilogy, which were all very electronic, and experimental, and so this was a kind of combination of the two, it's a transitional record, and it's, you know, very much, very respected for that now but, it's got a lot of soul in it, it's got a lot of melody and emotion, but it's also got some really hard, you know, harsh electronic, um influences as well, and was, it's, it's, it's just, it was a bit of a gear crunch, I think, kind of a record, and that, I just felt that was a gear crunch time in my life and it, sort of resonated with me.

(Sheena, interview)

It is interesting when considering the paratexts that surround Sheena's emotional connection with the record that she doesn't speak of lyrics. Instead she speaks of sounds used and the juxtaposition of the new and the conventional. The album itself opens with a phased train recording (echoing the work of Pierre Schaffer's music concrete output), which pans across the stereo field, and is processed to the point of near abstraction. This floats into a wailing electric guitar that maintains its place in the background of the mix just playing noises and tones rather than notes. A slow, open, minimal soul-esque but angular groove enters center stage. Some dissonant organs and synths fill the spaces behind this central drum and bass duo, fulfilling Sheena's assertion that

the mix between harsh electronic sounds and soulfulness was the experimental and transitional aesthetic of this record. The song 'Station to Station' is literally split in two halves, the slower crunchy roller turning on its head to become a pulsating disco stomper in the second half of the journey. We hear Bowie and his band trying to make sense of a number of contingent sonic experiences and personalities. The music takes on new sounds he has been hearing through the medium of recording, sounds he is chasing, indicating what he wants to get to in Berlin, the sounds of bands like Neu, Kraftwerk, and Can. It is evident that Sheena hears into the layers of this record and recognizes her own situation reflected right back at her. The tension of her current situation trying to break free from the constraints of both the past and the future played out through dissonance in the present. New sounds are vying for space with the old, new forms are taking over in the soundscape and the memory of the immanent becoming of the self, that this record sonically represents for her, remains traceable in the palimpsest of experience, overlaid with the passing of time. No matter how many years have passed by, the entanglements are still inscribed and are evidently legible for Sheena in the grooves of this record. She relates the story with great passion, and the detailed description and knowledge she displays are arresting. 'The palimpsest enables something that has disappeared from sight to resurrect; a trace to linger' (Bartolini, 2014: 520). I suppose the question is, would she have had the same reaction to this record without the NME, without the obvious retrospective reading, without the interferences from remembered images from Bowie's film, 'The Man Who Fell To Earth', which provided the cover image for the record. Would it have touched her in the same way without these socializing accretions onto the text itself? Born describes the musical object as a 'constellation of mediations' (Born, 2011: 377), which I find to be an extremely useful way to describe it, texts and counter texts invisibly linked like silken threads of light reaching and interacting with one another in the black space of the records' surface.

As we can ascertain from just this tiny snippet of Sheena's story, her relationship with this record is very personal and special to her. For example, at the end of the interview, holding the record in her hands for the last time before handing it to me so I could take it away and inscribe it with her story, she said, 'that was the object that made me feel so strongly, that made me make one decision rather than another, it's quite sobering actually, humbling you could say (laughs)...' The power of the 'thing' to evoke such deep feelings and to be able to store influential memories is evident here, but does not tell us the whole story.

Sheena was obviously in love with Bowie: 'I sort of thought of him as a soul mate, and I just trusted him, he just always seemed to reflect where I was, he was always showing me the next thing.' In the way she tells the story it could be read that she trusted him more than she trusted her own family. As with any great story, however, there must always be the 'helper', as defined by Propp, who aids our hero in their success. Sheena's helper during this time was the famous music magazine the New Musical Express:

When I was growing up, because it was strange you know, the family situation, I was an only child in a quite out of the way place, and music was important to me, you know the New Musical Express was my life-line, that led me into my career, which was working in record shops for many years.

Sheena is extremely knowledgeable not only about Bowie, but the wider musical milieu. She eloquently expresses an evolutionary taxonomy of bands and records that were influenced by or influenced Bowie, and so found their way into her own listenership. She speaks of Bowie's oeuvre not only with passion and enthusiasm, but also with great detail and factual expertise. For example, she elucidates on Bowie's use of the cut-up method when writing lyrics, describing

the process as Bowie taking a 'meta-approach'. Yet this understanding is not coming from the record itself, and one can be quite certain that it is not coming from Bowie himself.

So we must then think carefully about the influence of the NME as an important layer in the palimpsestuous whole of Sheena's listening and the formation of her relationship with this record and the music it carries. Although Sheena has engaged deeply with the writings in the NME over the period of her extensive involvement in music, this is not the sole narrative of her experience. It is intertwined with her own story, her personal interaction with the record, and her road drawn on the map of its apprehension. The NME becomes a conduit for Sheena to embrace the detail of her hero's life. The writings become a way of contextualizing his experience, and it provides a hook for her to attach herself to a position inside this music generally, but specifically inside the expression of Bowie's alienated experiences... 'for many years being passionate about music was a big part of my identity, I suppose I wanted people to know.' She obviously loves/d Bowie, and felt a kinship, a closeness, an emotional bond, through the music he was part of creating. She was able to identify herself through these sounds he presented, the songs he fostered. This knowledge and the sharing of this passion required an empirical as well as emotional subjectivity, which could then be shared and allow for what we see now as a rounded and comprehensive understanding of his work and its relation to her as an individual.

The NME provided the basis to consolidate what Hesmondhalgh refers to as music's 'semi-otic indefiniteness' that 'gives it a superior power to engage with our emotions' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 16). Sheena repeats the canonical information about the work, the process of lyric writing, the places of creation, and the musical expression channeling Bowie's interior tensions. Barthes explains that by 'allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' victory to the critic' (Barthes, 1977: 147). This explanation provides further dialectical enmeshments within the 'palimpsestuous' reading of the vinyl record. Sheena's use of the NME to become closer to the author himself, to better understand the music that she loves, could be read as a reductive process. The temporal elisions that make up the palimpsest articulate a constant becoming, where the text is never stagnant and is constantly in flux, knowing that it is equally past, present, and future subsequently. The constant iterations open the text to the imagination of the listener, allowing us to explore the poetics of music's materiality. Therefore, the totalizing effects of the industrial voice which, some have argued, silences all individuals under its blanket of white noise, in no way accounts for the kind of collusion that we find in stories such as Sheena's. It could be said that these paratexts maintain the status of the author that Barthes so convincingly killed, and in part, the impact on the listeners' imagination is a regressive one – looking for meaning outside of the text does not allow one to fully immerse oneself in the act of listening. Yet through the palimpsest the promise of resurrection is always possible, all the voices remain, and have the potential to be unveiled again to produce new and productive alliances at the point of the text's destination in the future. The point of departure that made the record so very powerful in the first place still exists, it is just muffled under the blanket of time.

There is an apparent togetherness, a link between those who value vinyl records and their corporeality. As we age the record ages with us, a constant reminder of our own fragility. It is often ascribed with human characteristics, as the record is spoken of in terms of its warmth, its flaws, its softness, its ageing patinas, its smell, and so on. The sense of an object's life running in parallel with our own appeals to something within us, beyond just engaging with its functional purpose. Yochim and Biddinger have described a 'persistent alliance between records and anxieties between life and death' (Yochim and Biddinger, 2008), a conception of this little black disc as somehow transcendent.

As I have mapped out above in the case of Sheena's story, the musical journey is one that is traced, yet untraceable, through the continuous intertwining of lived and mediated experiences dissecting the grooves and troughs of daily life. As we take our collections with us on this journey, 'the vinyl record becomes a palimpsest that has a history of layered marks that you can't erase, incidental scratches become a natural part of the piece, not a mistake but integral to its meaning and composition' (Estep, 2001: 39). As do we, the vinyl record loses a few cells everyday, changing its sounding properties, the roughness of life flattening the sound, dulling the sharpness of its comment, fading out the voice over time, weakness taking hold, the volume dropping, and a softness enveloping the communication. The materiality of the record exposes its 'grain'. The dirt sticks. It sticks to us as it sticks to the record, and is destructive for both in its accumulation. New sound worlds open up as each day passes; just as the fleshy voice changes with each cigarette, as each coffee, each conversation, song in the shower, party, and kiss destroys us slowly, so it does with the records we keep to remember these moments by.

There has been a constant adumbration of death throughout the history of recording. Records themselves are the carriers of ghostly voices being spun forth from the illegible grooves. The dead are enlivened through the technology of the phonograph, a library of lost voices captured in vinyl sarcophagi, for example. Kittler described the wax cylinder as 'the corpse that speaks' (Kittler, 1986: 83). Technologies that reproduce sound invoke a liminal netherworld, a space inside an in-between embodied space. Reproduction platforms displace the voice, giving the listener access to a disembodied persona emanating from somewhere beyond the realms of possibility, strangely untraceable and certainly untouchable, an uncanny presence pervading the private space of the listener. The vinyl record when unsheathed from its cardboard sleeve seems to act as a black hole or a portal. Notions of loss and absence are palpable in this acousmatic space, yet the listener holds the power of reanimation. The vinyl voodoo doll stabbed by the needle is resurrected time and again, screaming its invocation from the depths of the groove, but in a macabre paradox we kill the very thing that we also love. 'This gouging scoring action of the needle adds a spectre of pain to the process of playing the record, linking phonography to dentistry, carving inscription onto gravestones, vaccination, the art of tattooing, acupuncture, piercings, heroin, murder' (Toop, 2003: 126).

In these private trysts we commune with our chosen author, we call on them to explain how we feel, how we look, what we think about the world from which we are attempting to escape through their noise. For in that one side of playing time, out to the horizon on their sound wave, we have to 'create a king worthy of killing' (Burke, 1998: 26). But as I have shown above, 'you are free to fill your mind with the music itself, or the music with your mind' (Eisenberg, 2005: 204). So writer after writer, performer after performer, is unable to fully extricate us from ourselves, we are at one with them, singing along, reading the sleeve notes, the articles and interviews and muddying up the signal.

Yet the surface of the record, which 'is kind of taboo ... poses a temptation' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 85). It acts as the mechanized embodiment of the siren song, drawing us into hypnotic spiral and affording us a tactile pleasure. The record is transformative, and has a tradition of being transformed. So I took up my awl and with the trepidation inherent in the act of destruction, began to cut a new narrative, to expose these intersecting voices, and open up the static circle to new boundaries of usage.

References

- Attali, J. (1985), *Noise and the Political Economy of Music* (Manchester University Press).
Barthes, R. (1977), *Image, Music, Text* (Fontana Press).

- Bartmanski, D. and Woodward, I. (2015), *Vinyl: The Analogue Record in the Digital Age* (Bloomsbury).
- Bartolini, N. (2014), Critical Urban Heritage: From Palimpsest to Brecciation, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20(5), 519–533.
- Born, G. (2011), Music and the Materialization of Identities, *Journal of Material Culture*, 16(4), 376–388.
- Burke, S. (1998), *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh University Press, 2nd ed.).
- Chivers, Yochim E. and Biddinger, E. (2008), It Kind of Gives You That Vintage Feel: Vinyl Records and the Trope of Death, *Media, Culture and Society*, 30(2), 183–195.
- Chan, S. (1998), Music(ology) Needs A Context – Re-interpreting Goa Trance, *Perfect Beat*, 3(4), 93–97.
- Daughtry, J. (2013), Acoustic Palimpsests and the Politics of Listening. *Music and Politics*, Music and Politics, Vol. VII(1).
- Derrida, J. (1968), Differance, in Badminton, N. and Thomas, J. (eds), *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2008).
- Dillon, S. (2005), Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies, *Textual Practice*, 19(3), 243–263.
- Eisenberg, E. (2005), *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, originally published in 1987 (Yale University Press, 2nd ed.).
- Estep, J. (2001), Words and Music, in Criqui J-P, (ed.), Conversation with Jan Estep, *On & By Christian Marclay* (MIT Press, 2014, 39–48).
- Gosta, T. (2011), Sir Walter's Palimpsests: Material Imprints and the Trace of the Past, *European Romantic Review*, 22(6), 707–726.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013), *Why Music Matters* (Wiley Blackwell).
- Irvine, M. (2015), Remix and the Dialogic Engine of Culture: A Model for Generative Combinatoriality, in Navas, E., Gallagher, O., and Burrough, X. (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies* (Routledge, 2015, 15–43).
- Kittler, F. (1986), *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford University Press).
- Knizak, M. (1996), Destroyed Music [online] available at www.milanknizak.com/195-hudba/220-destruovana-hudba/ [accessed 24.5.15].
- Middleton, R. (1990), *Studying Popular Music* (Open University Press).
- Osbourne, R. (2012), *Vinyl: A History of the Analogue Record* (Ashgate).
- Toop, D. (2003), Performative Image, Inscribed, Even: The Fluid Sound Worlds of Christian Marclay, in Criqui, J-P. (ed.), *On & By Christian Marclay* (MIT Press, 2014, 125–133).